



Q SEARCH ...



(<http://www.truthsayers.org/>)

TRUTHSAYERS ([HTTP://WWW.TRUTHSAYERS .ORG/](http://www.truthsayers.org/))

The People's Platform

October 26, 2016 (<http://www.truthsayers.org/2016/10/26/tragically-he-died-alone-cayuga-medical-center-nurses-say-staffing-levels-unsafe/>)

**'Tragically, he died alone:' Cayuga Medical Center
Nurses Say Staffing Levels Unsafe**

HEALTH CARE

([HTTP://WWW.TRUTHSAYERS.ORG/CATEGORY/HEALTH-CARE/](http://www.truthsayers.org/category/health-care/)),
ITHACA ([HTTP://WWW.TRUTHSAYERS.ORG/CATEGORY/ITHACA/](http://www.truthsayers.org/category/ithaca/)),
LABOR ([HTTP://WWW.TRUTHSAYERS.ORG/CATEGORY/LABOR/](http://www.truthsayers.org/category/labor/))

By Josh Brokaw

Cayuga Medical Center nurses in critical care units say that the hospital’s staffing patterns frequently put patients at risk. The nurses say there are often not enough skilled nurses scheduled per shift to take adequate care of patients.

Nurses in the emergency department [ED], intensive care unit [ICU], and behavioral services unit [BSU] who spoke for this series listed nurse-to-patient staffing ratios as one of their top reasons for supporting a union at CMC. Their concerns were part of why they first started organizing for an union vote, before the recent mass exodus of nurses from Tompkins County’s only hospital.

October 24: Nurses Leaving Cayuga Medical Center in ‘Mass Exodus’ (<http://www.truthsayers.org/2016/10/24/nurses-leaving-cayuga-medical-center-in-mass-exodus/>)

“I was feeling I was putting my license on the line,” said Cristina Avalor, an ED nurse who left in May 2016 for a hospital in California, the only state where nurse-to-patient ratios are set by law.



Emergency room entrance at Cayuga Medical Center, October 2016. Photograph: Josh Brokaw

Nurses say they fear incidents like the two described by an anonymous poster on [hospitalsafetyreviews.com](http://www.hospitalsafetyreviews.com) (<http://www.hospitalsafetyreviews.com/cayuga-medical-center-ithaca-new-york/>), a website set up by Dan Walter, a Florida-based health care journalist.

In one incident, the poster reports, “a patient in the ICU died because a Levophed drip ran dry, and there were not enough nurses on the floor to hear the pump alarm. There were several critically ill people needing multiple nurses in the room to care for them, so when the pump ran dry in one patient’s room no one heard it until the alarm on the monitor sounded – and by then it was too late.”

The other incident described in that post affected Erin Bell, a CMC emergency nurse who left in May 2016.

Here’s how the anonymous reporter described it:

(<http://www.hospitalsafetyreviews.com/cayuga-medical-center-ithaca-new-york/>)

“Another event in the ER consisted of a nurse assigned with four patients. Two were critically ill and intubated headed to the ICU, one was stable and the other was actively dying and in need of comfort and pain control. The nurse was so overwhelmed and the ER was so understaffed for the night, no one was available to help her. The other four nurses, including the charge nurse, had four or more patients a piece. The nurse with the critically ill patients and the dying patient had to make a determination of whether to comfort and relieve the pain of an elderly dying man or save the patient that was intubated on multiple IV’s and life sustaining meds. The **elderly man died a painful death, alone**. With more staff he could have had pain control and someone with him.”

“That was my patient.” Bell said. There were actually three nurses on that night who were legally allowed to take patients, she said: the fourth nurse had less than a year of nursing experience and was orienting to the ED.

“She was taking care of patients without much oversight, because of how

busy we were,” Bell said.

The patient’s family “was giving palliative orders over the phone,” Bell said. “He was on death’s door. I was told to keep him comfortable ... Tragically, he died alone and in pain. I had to take care of patients I still had a chance to save, but I still carry that guilt with me.”

That incident was one of the triggers, Bell said, that led her to actively organize nurses to join SEIU 1199 until she left CMC in May 2016.

A letter posted on hospitalsafetyreviews.com (<http://www.hospitalsafetyreviews.com/forums/topic/cayuga-responds-with-talking-points/>) from David Evelyn, CMC vice president of medical affairs, said that “Our Quality and Patient Safety Department have investigated the claims by the anonymous writer and cannot substantiate them based the information we have.”

Asked to comment on that finding, Bell said “That’s why don’t allow companies to internally investigate.”



Cayuga Medical Center nurses Scott Marsland, Erin Bell, and Cheryl Durkee table for unionization support at the 2015 Apple Harvest Festival, Ithaca Commons. Photograph via Facebook.

Nurses in critical units say that CMC’s use of floating nurses to fill staffing gaps is a detriment to patient care. [Floating nurses are those scheduled in one department when they typically work in another.]

The BSU was “short-staffed on weekends, with more floating nurses than those trained in mental health care,” said “Rhonda,” a former BSU nurse whose name we’re withholding.

Having more floating nurses than nurses trained in mental health care is “unsafe,” Rhonda said, “because a lot of patients have a tendency to have outbursts, or get physically violent.”

“You can’t have a medical nurse go to the ICU and function,” said Michael Doan, a former director of the telemetry unit. “A nurse is not a nurse is not a nurse.”

Anne Marshall, an ICU nurse, wrote a story in October 2015 on the “Unionizing CMC” Facebook group illustrating the issue of float nurses.

“(A) surgeon came to check on his patient in ICU and was dismayed to find that a float nurse was caring for his patient. When the surgeon asked the ICU charge nurse why this occurred she replied “we didn’t have enough of our own staff to care for all these patients, so the ICU nurses are caring for the most critical and yours isn’t one of them.” His reply, “I put my patient here for ICU care and they are not getting it!” The charge nurses’ hands were tied she could only provide ICU care for a certain number of patients that night and the surgeons wasn’t one of them ...”

In the ICU, “every nurse is supposed to have two patients,” Marshall said. “We were never staffed for that.”

When we first spoke in August, before Marshall’s termination, she said there were five nurses on the ICU caring for 13 patients on the last 12-hour shift she’d completed. One of those nurses was on a 1-to-1 assignment, “because the patient was so sick.”

October 13: CMC RNs Fired: Policy Violation or Union Busting? Read the story about Marshall’s termination.

(<http://www.truthsayers.org/2016/10/13/cmc-rns-fired-policy-violation-or-union-busting/>)

Organizing nurses hope that a union contract would help them set nurse-to-patient ratios. The “model contract” that SEIU 1199 says it uses in negotiations (<http://www.1199seiu.org/contracts>), that with the League of Voluntary Hospitals, includes set nurse-to-patient ratios. Several nurses also mentioned, with some hope, efforts to pass a statewide nurse-to-patient ratio law that have been spearheaded by the New York State Association of Nurses (<http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2016/06/historic-evening-for-nurses-as-staffing-bill-passes-assembly-102890>), a statewide nurses’ union with more than 37,000 members. The “Safe Staffing for Quality Care Act” passed the New York state Assembly by a 103-31 in June 2016, the first time a staffing ratio bill has passed either chamber of the state legislature.

Emails asking for comment sent to John Turner and Brian Forrest, CMC vice presidents of public relations and human resources, respectively, were not returned. On October 25, I submitted a request to Turner for nursing staffing numbers and certain patient outcomes under the Nursing Care Quality Protection Act.

([http://w3.health.state.ny.us/dbspace/NYCRR10.nsf/56cf2e25d626f9f785256538006c3ed7/95e2f0a856857ace85257dc1005611d4?](http://w3.health.state.ny.us/dbspace/NYCRR10.nsf/56cf2e25d626f9f785256538006c3ed7/95e2f0a856857ace85257dc1005611d4?OpenDocument&Highlight=0,400.25)

[OpenDocument&Highlight=0,400.25](http://w3.health.state.ny.us/dbspace/NYCRR10.nsf/56cf2e25d626f9f785256538006c3ed7/95e2f0a856857ace85257dc1005611d4?OpenDocument&Highlight=0,400.25)) CMC has until November 24 to produce those numbers.


Since April 2015, nurses at Cayuga Medical Center, Tompkins County’s only hospital, have been organizing to form a union.


Local media coverage has been limited. Help support further stories on this issue from this independent reporter with a donation at the link

(<https://www.paypal.me/Truthsayers>). Send me tips and suggestions at the email below.

Next in this series (<http://www.truthsayers.org/tag/cayuga-medical-center/>): Nurses say that CMC’s practices in setting schedules and giving breaks are arbitrary, and in some cases illegal.


SPREAD TRUTH

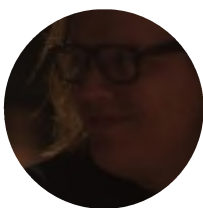
 Email (<http://www.truthsayers.org/2016/10/26/tragically-he-died-alone-cayuga-medical-center-nurses-say-staffing-levels-unsafe/#share-email>)

 Print (<http://www.truthsayers.org/2016/10/26/tragically-he-died-alone-cayuga-medical-center-nurses-say-staffing-levels-unsafe/#print>)

Share 237

submit

 More



Josh Brokaw is an independent reporter based in Ithaca, N.Y.
Email josh.brokaw@truthsayers.org with tips, story suggestions,
and gentle criticism.
Twitter: [@jdbrokaw](https://twitter.com/jdbrokaw)

1 thought on “‘Tragically, he died alone:’ Cayuga Medical Center Nurses Say Staffing Levels Unsafe”



ARELY MELENDEZ |

OCTOBER 29, 2016 AT 4:53 PM
([HTTP://WWW.TRUTHSAYERS.ORG/2016/10/26/TRAGICALLY-HE-DIED-ALONE-CAYUGA-MEDICAL-CENTER-NURSES-SAY-STAFFING-LEVELS-UNSAFE/#COMMENT-7](http://www.truthsayers.org/2016/10/26/TRAGICALLY-HE-DIED-ALONE-CAYUGA-MEDICAL-CENTER-NURSES-SAY-STAFFING-LEVELS-UNSAFE/#COMMENT-7))

I belong to 1199 and it doesn't make a difference ratio of patients to staff dangerous. No one is stepping in to fix the situation. We are told to fill out unsafe staffing.

Comments are closed.

Proudly powered by WordPress (<http://wordpress.org/>) | Theme Zillah by Themeisle
(<http://themeisle.com/>)

[Back to top](#) ⤴



Unionizing CMC RNs

October 26, 2016 · 🌐

Another great article by journalist Josh Brokaw regarding the deplorable state of affairs at Tompkins County only hospital Cayuga Medical Center in Ithaca, NY.

Please read and share. This community needs to speak up and make a change to take back their hospital that serves them!



'Tragically, he died alone:' Cayuga Medical Center Nurses Say Staffing Levels Unsafe

Cayuga Medical Center nurses in critical care units say that the hospital's staffing patterns frequently put patients at risk. The nurses say there are often not enough...

TRUTHSAYERS.ORG

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share



👍 😞 5

Chronological ▾



Patty Thayer Sad and angry and distressed and disappointed.

Like · Reply · 👍 1 · October 26, 2016 at 5:47pm



Nurses at Cayuga Medical Center say staffing levels are unsafe, one of the primary reasons they started organizing to join a union.

Like this page and/or follow on Twitter @truthsayersnews for future installments in this series about the state of affairs at Tompkins County's only hospital.

- Josh Brokaw



'Tragically, he died alone:' Cayuga Medical Center Nurses Say Staffing Levels Unsafe

Cayuga Medical Center nurses in critical care units say that the hospital's staffing patterns frequently put patients at risk. The nurses say there are often not enough...

TRUTHSAYERS.ORG

Like Comment Share



3